lished in the 'Times of India' dated 10th May, 1995 under the caption "HEC officers plan suit against Industrial Development Bank of India";

(b) if so, what are the details and the reaction of Government thereto; and

(c) whether the Association has requested for the merger of the HEC with Steel Authority of India and if so, the action proposed to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY (SHRIMATI KRISHNA SAHI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) As and when a suit is filed, necessary action will be taken.

(c) Representations have been received for the possible merger of HEC with SAIL. The proposal for the linkage of HEC with SAIL was taken up with the Ministry of Steel, whose response has not been favourable.

Increase in Price of Cement

8223. SHRI VIRENDRA KATARIA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the rate of cement bags has increased from Rupees 100 to 150 per bag during the last four months; and

(b) if so, what are the reasons for the abnormal rise and what steps Government propose to take to bring down the price of cement in order to enable the low and middle income people to purchase cement for construction of their dwelling units?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY (SHRIMATI KRISHNA SAHI): (a) Government are aware that in the last 4 months the retail price per bag of 50 kgs. cement in different consumption centres has increased ranging between Rs. 10 and Rs. 20 on an average.

(b) The main reasons for the rise in price are seasonal increase in demand, temporary shortage in certain consumption centres caused by infrastuctural constraints, increase in input costs, preference of consumers for cement having better brand image even at a higher price, etc. Although the price and distribution of cement have been de-controlled, Government is closely monitoring the price behaviour. Government is also providing all infrastructural support for increasing production and supply of wagons on priority basis for transportation of cement from surplus to deficit areas in order to strengthen market forces and keep the prices under check.

Level Playing Field for Indian Companies

8224. SHRI SANATAN BISI: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Indian companies are denied equal level playing field as reported in "The Times of India" (Business Times Bureau), New Delhi dated the 8th May, 1995; and

(b) if so, what measures are being taken to wipe out this feeling in the liberalisation programmes?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY (SHRIMATI KRISHNA SAHI): (a) and (b) No such report in "The Times of India" (Business Times Bureau), New Delhi dated the 8th May, 1995 regarding denial of equal level playing field to the Indian compaines has come to the notice of Government. However, under the current economic reforms, various measures have already been taken to enable the domestic industry attain international competitiveness. Some of the measures taken by the Government, inter-alia, include reducting in excise duties, switchover to value added tax, levy of countervailing duty whevere required, reduction in corporate tax, etc.